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ABSTRACT

Over a three-year period, 297 speech communication students were surveyed on how frequently they were exposed to the use of case studies in instruction, the settings and the extent to which case studies were used, preferences for the use of case studies, and the extent to which they liked case studies in their educational experience. The results of the survey showed that 60% of the students had had prior educational experiences with case studies, usually at the high school level and almost always in formal educational settings. The students generally liked the use of case studies and thought that case studies should be used to complement rather than substitute for traditional instructional activities such as readings and lectures. Students' comments indicated that case studies (1) facilitated understanding of the program being considered, (2) facilitated understanding of the members of the group, (3) provided a focus for the group, (4) facilitated group interaction, and (5) provided an environment in which a student could understand fellow classmates. The disadvantages of case studies that the students mentioned included the ideas that "uninvolved" classmates would be "carried" by the group and that case studies required more work than traditional assignments. (RL)

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SURVEY OF RESPONSES TO CASE STUDIES IN THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE: LIKES AND DISLIKES

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Historically the custom and practice in the study of speech communication has featured the use of case studies. The ancient and contemporary practice of studying examples of public eloquence has produced several results: an increase in one's knowledge of humanity, the derivation of standards of critical appraisal of public discourse, and the enlargement and deepening of an understanding of rhetorical theory.[1] More recently, the use of case studies in instruction in argumentation and debate,[2] group discussion,[3] and interpersonal communication[4] has been fostered by textbooks.[5] In a typical classroom where case studies are used the sequence of tactics in the case study strategy of instruction includes: 1) the presentation of theory in lectures, readings, and discussion of relevant concepts; 2) the introduction of carefully selected cases; 3) the analysis of the sample case by students; and 4) student feedback in an oral and/or written mode.

One author suggested a different approach be taken in the use of case studies in classroom instruction in communication. In his book, Customs and Crises in Communication, Irving J. Lee proposed that students be presented cases, be encouraged to analyze them in small group discussions, and be assisted in developing their own theories and tactics in confronting barriers and breakdowns in communicative encounters. Few who use case studies in instruction appear to have opted for Lee's suggestion.

Those who write textbooks which feature case studies and those of us who have employed case studies in our classrooms point to five advantages of their use. The first advantage is that the theoretical aspects of the course can be tested and integrated by a student if he can "discover" the linkage between theory and practice in well selected cases. A specific theory or concept can be presented in a more familiar, relevant case context. Secondly, usually the essential information in a case can be mastered by a student in a brief period of time thus allowing him/her to search for the keys to the integration of the concepts and theory. Thirdly, the individual student usually is able to focus on the necessity of discovering the considerations which are relevant to the case. Fourthly, students say they like case studies as a way to learn. Finally, case studies adapted to specific communicative activities provide flexibility in instruction.

Two major drawbacks to using case studies in instruction are apparent: 1) the individual student analysis and the class discussion of cases is time consuming, and 2) the selection of contemporary, relevant cases which match the theoretical, conceptual elements of the course is sometimes difficult.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine student reactions to the use of case studies in a unit on small group discussion in a fundamentals of speech communication class which contained

four basic units: a unit on basic theoretical concepts in communication, a unit on interpersonal communication, a unit on public speaking and a unit on small group problem solving.[6] Specifically, the survey sought to determine how frequently students are exposed to the use of case studies in instruction; the settings in which case studies were used; the extent to which case studies were used; student preference for the use of case studies; and the extent to which students like case studies in their educational experience.

PROCEDURE

The investigation began during the Spring Semester of 1978 when eight sections of a team taught fundamentals of speech communication course used stimulus case studies as the basis for a small group problem solving discussion assignment. The students were given 10 to 12 sample cases to read. Each student selected the three cases which he/she wanted to discuss; groups were determined by matching student preferences. Following the problem solving discussion, students were given an eleven item questionnaire designed to determine their reactions to the use of case studies in the small group communication unit. Participation in the survey was voluntary. From 1978 to 1981, twenty-two sections of Fundamentals of Speech Communication were surveyed after the small group communication case study assignment. Of the 441 questionnaires which were distributed, a total of 297 questionnaires or 67 percent were used. Of the 144 questionnaires which were not

used 93 were not returned and 51 were unusuable because 4 or more of the 11 questions were not answered. For those who failed to return the survey or answer it completely, there was no pattern across age, class standing or semester.

RESULTS

The students who responded to the survey were primarily freshmen who were nineteen years of age. 57.6 percent of the respondents were male; 42.4 percent were female. The range of ages of the students was 18 to 53 years. The median age was 31 years; the mean was 22.5 years. The mode was 19 years. The mean age of this sample of 22.5 years might be better understood if we realize that at the urban university campus where the survey was conducted the mean of the age of all students was 25.1 years with a range of 16 to 76 years in 1977.[7]

The breakdown of responses by year in school includes:

Year in School Number of Sections	Semester	F.	Soph.	Jr.	Sn.
1	Su '81	1	5	6	3
2	Sp '81	21	6	3	0
3	F '80	35	7	2	3
2	Su '79	9	8	5	9
4	Sp '79	32	20	3	1
2	F '78	27	2	3	1
8	Sp '78	59	22	3	1
Total 22		184	70	25	18

n_{297}

Percentages: 61.9 23.8 8.3 6.0

The data on the ratio of male to female students in the sample was:

Gender

Semester	Male	Female
Su '81	8	7
Sp '81	15	15
F '80	29	18
Su '79	15	16
Sp '79	35	21
F '78	14	5
Sp '78	47	38
Total $_{n283*}$	163	120

Percentages: 57.6 42.4
*14 students failed to respond to the category.

Student Experience With Case Studies

Three items on the questionnaire asked the student to indicate if he/she had been in prior settings where case studies were used to stimulate small group discussion; where that experience took place (junior high school, high school, college, other); and, an estimate of the number of those experiences. 61.6 percent indicated that they had been in settings where case studies were used as a basis for small group discussion. The breakdown of the data included:

Prior Assignments in Which Case Studies Were Used

Semester	Yes	No
Su '81	12	2
Sp '81	17	13
F '80	28	19
Su '79	12	18
Sp '79	35	18
F '78	9	10
Sp '78	54	31
Total $_{n278*}$	167	111

Percentages: 61.1 39.9
*19 students failed to respond to the item.

After indicating he/she had had prior experience in discussions which featured case studies, each was asked to indicate the nature of the setting in which those discussions occurred. Because multiple responses were permitted, we have a fairly extensive reaction to the item. There were 237 responses: 51.5 percent indicated that their prior experience with case study discussions took place in high school; 28.7 percent indicated that they had had collegiate experience with case study discussions; 14.3 percent said that their prior experience occurred in junior high school; and 5.5 percent had had case study discussions on the job. The responses were:

On Those Prior Occasions You Were In Semester	Junior H. S.	High School	College	Other
Su '81	3	7	9	5
Sp '81	4	15	4	0
F '80	8	21	7	3
Su '79	3	6	9	0
Sp '79	6	23	18	0
F '78	1	6	3	1
Sp '78	9	44	18	4
Total n_{237}	34	122	68	13
Percentages:	14.3	51.5	28.7	5.5

Student Preferences of Case Studies

A further question asked students to indicate if they liked or disliked the use of stimulus case studies in classroom instruction. Of those who responded 89.5 percent liked the use of case studies while 10.5 percent indicated they disliked the use of case studies in classroom instruction. The data include:

Do You Like the Use of Stimulus Case Studies?

Semester	Yes	No
Su '81	14	1
Sp '81	28	2
F '80	39	7
Su '79	30	1
Sp '79	54	2
F '78	17	10
Sp '78	74	7
Total	256	30
n_{286}*		

Percentages: 89.5 10.5
*11 students failed to respond to the item.

Irving Lee suggested that case studies be used to assist students in developing their own coping skills in overcoming communication problems and breakdowns. Specifically, Lee argued that the act of students analyzing cases and synthesizing conclusions about communication without lectures by professors was sufficient. The professor's role was to be that of a facilitator of discussion. A question on the survey was designed to uncover the view of students on the issue. The students were asked: "Do you think case studies should be used to complement or be substituted for lectures and/or **readings**?" Of those who responded, 87.3 percent said case studies should be used to complement lectures and/or readings; 12.7 percent thought case studies should be substituted for lectures and/or readings. The responses were as follows:

Do You Think Case Studies Should be Used to Complement or be Substituted for Lectures and/or Readings?

Semester	Complement	Substituted
Su '81	14	0
Sp '81	23	4
F '80	38	2
Su '79	25	5
Sp '79	37	17
F '78	39	5
Sp '78	71	3
Total	247	36
n_{283}*		

Percentages: 87.3 12.7
*14 students failed to respond to the item.

Open Ended Responses

Two final questions on the survey permitted students to indicate what they thought were the major advantages and the major disadvantages of case studies. An interesting pattern emerged in response to the questions. 90.4 percent responded to the question "What are the major advantages of case studies as far as students are concerned?" 9.6 percent failed to respond to the question. On the companion question "What are the major disadvantages of case studies as far as students are concerned?" only 70.3 percent responded; 29.7 percent failed to respond. It would appear that students are willing to comment favorably on the advantages of case studies while being somewhat reticent to point to the disadvantages of them.

Five principal open ended comments were offered by students as major advantages of the use of case studies in classroom instruction. Many students responded that case studies facilitated a better understanding of the discussion problem because the process generated diverse ideas on the topic. So students viewed the use of case studies as 1) facilitating and 2) generative. Another frequent response was that case studies provided a clearer focus for the group than a single discussion question would have. In addition to facilitating the generation of ideas, students responded that group interaction fostered individual understanding of fellow classmates. In sum, the five responses were: 1) case studies facilitate understanding of the problem; 2) case studies facilitate understanding of the members of the

group; 3) case studies provide a focus for the group; 4) case studies facilitate group interaction; and 5) case studies provide an environment in which a student can understand his/her fellow classmates.

The principal disadvantage to the use of case studies in instruction cited by the students was that their use was more time consuming than readings and lectures would have been. A second frequently mentioned disadvantage was that diverse ideas and backgrounds are mixed in such an assignment. Thirdly, many students expressed a concern that an "uninvolved" classmate would be able to be "carried" by the group. The fourth major disadvantage articulated by the students was that the use of case studies required more work of them than did traditional individual assignments.

CONCLUSIONS

Student reactions to the use of case studies in a discussion unit of a Fundamentals of Speech Communication course show that 60.1 percent of those surveyed had had prior educational experiences in which case studies were used as a tactic in instruction. 51.5 percent of those responding indicated that their prior experience with case studies in instruction occurred in high school; 28.7 percent had had their experience in college. Fewer than six percent of those surveyed indicated experience with case study small group problem solving in settings other than in formal educational settings. It would appear that high school and college educators lead the way in using case studies in instruction.

The subjects of this survey liked the use of case studies in instruction and thought that if case studies are used they should complement, rather than be substituted for, traditional instructional activities such as readings and lectures.

Although the current findings indicate general reactions of students to the use of case studies in instruction, much more needs to be determined. Questions such as: "Does the gender of the student play a role in preference for or against the use of case studies in instruction?" "Does the learning style of the student influence preferences?" "Does prior experience, its nature and extent, affect student preferences for case studies in instruction?" need answers. So basic a question as "Which, if any, specific activities in speech communication instruction are optimally presented in the case study mode of instruction?" must be answered. We have little evidence that case studies should assume a more central position in our strategy of instruction in speech communication.

Even though we have much to learn about the nature of the effect of the use of case studies in instruction, the use of case studies as described by the students in this survey suggested that such an approach did assist them in becoming a liberally educated person. We would all like to think that we are assisting our students in reaching the ideal of a liberally educated person as articulated by John Henry Cardinal Newman in his lecture, "Knowledge and Professional Skill." Newman told his audience that

> ...education...(should give) a man a clear conscious view of his own opinion and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant. 8

As much as any other of our speech communication activities, it seems to me that the use of case studies in communication instruction provides an enviornment in which the goals of a liberal education might be tested.

Footnotes

[1] Wil A. Linkugal, R. R. Allen, and Richard Johannesan, Contemporary American Speeches: A Sourcebook of Speech Forms and Principles, 4th. ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 1-8. See also: John F. Wilson and Carroll C. Arnold, Public Speaking as a Liberal Art, 4th. ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978), pp. 390-399.

[2] Harry P. Kerr, Opinion and Evidence: Cases for Argument and Discussion (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. vii.

[3] Irving J. Lee, Customs and Crises in Communication: Cases for the Study of Barriers and Breakdowns (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1954).

[4] Kim Giffin and Bobby R. Patton, Basic Readings in Interpersonal Communication: Theory and Application, 2nd. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), pp. 170-272.

[5] Of course the widespread use of case studies in instruction commenced with its application to instruction in Common Law which revolutionized legal education in America at the turn of the century. See: Josef Redlich, The Common Law and the Case Method in American University Law Schools: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Bulletin #8 (Boston: D. P. Updike, the Merrymount Press, 1914). The practice of using case studies soon was adopted in business education when Harvard Business School embraced it in its program of human relations training.

[6] A combination/context course is the label given to introductory speech communication courses which feature as their basic orientation a "multiple or combined thrust" of topics and performance situations in Gibson, et. al., "The Basic Course in Speech at U. S. Colleges and Universities: III." See: James W. Gibson, Charles R. Gruner, Michael S. Hanna, Mary-Jeanette Smythe, and Michael T. Hayes, "The Basic Course in Speech at U. S. Colleges and Universities: III," Communication Education, 29 (Jan. 1980), pp. 1-9.

7
Jack Ulmer, "Student Profile Summary--Fall, 1977," Student Life/Program Report at IPFW (Ft. Wayne, In.: Office of the Dean of Students, 1977), p. 22. The "average age of student body" for the years 1975, 1976, 1977 was 25.1 years. Over the period 1975-1977, a shift took place in the ratio of males to female students. In 1975 the ratio was 54% to 46%. In 1977, the ratio was 48.1 % male to 51.9% females. The average age of the student body has continued to be at 25 years. The male/female ratio has also continued at the 1977 rate.

8
John Henry Cardinal Newman, The Idea of a University (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 191 ff.